ECWCS Improves Survivability, Comfort

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Program Executive Office (PEO) Soldier's Generation III Extended Cold Weather Clothing System (ECWCS) is now a part of the Rapid Fielding Initiative. The system, which is fielded to all Soldiers deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan, is a 12-piece, seven-layer system that allows the Soldiers to dress up or down to their own comfort levels to accomplish their missions without being cold or overheating.

GEN III ECWCS is rated to perform in weather 40 degrees above to 60 degrees below zero. Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Cavoli, commander of the 10th Mountain Division's 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, has firsthand knowledge of the benefit of having the appropriate clothing for the extreme cold weather conditions in Afghanistan.

"During Operation Mountain Lion I found myself praying for bad weather, the first time in my military career I was actually begging for a cold front to come through. I knew my Soldiers could handle it and the enemy couldn't," said LTC Cavoli. "ECWCS allowed my men to outlast the enemy on their own terrain. When the enemy was forced out of the mountains due to the bitter cold to take shelter, that's when we got them."

If all the Soldiers in a unit are wearing the same layers, then that defeats one of the key features of the system. Soldiers come from across the country. Those growing up in Maine or Alaska might have different needs for comfort than those who grew up in Georgia or Texas. This system meets all those needs. Uniformity is important and is built in through the use of the Universal Camouflage Pattern and Foliage Green throughout the system. Hook and loop tapes for rank, name and U.S. Army also add to uniformity, according to Ron Pollack, the Quality Assurance Analyst for Product Manager Clothing and Individual Equipment (PM CIE).

Guidelines to make the most of the system are included in the technical manual issued with the system. A use and care manual is also provided, along with a period of instruction on the proper wear and fit of the system.

The seven-layer ensemble provides many options for personalization and includes the following 12 pieces:

*** Lightweight Cold Weather Undershirt/Drawers** are constructed of "silk weight" moisture-wicking polyester.

*** Midweight Cold Weather Shirt/Drawers** are constructed of polyester "grid" fleece. They will provide light insulation for use in mild climates as well as act as a layer for colder climates, and they provide an increased surface area for transporting moisture away from the Soldier during movement.

*** Fleece Cold Weather Jacket** acts as the primary insulation layer for use in moderate to cold climate.

*** Wind Cold Weather Jacket** acts as a low-volume shell layer, optimizing the performance of moisture wicking along with insulation layers when combined with Interceptor Body Armor (IBA) and/or Army Combat Uniform (ACU) in mild to transitional environments such as desert day to desert evening. It is made of a lightweight, windproof, and water-repellent material. Design features include full-zip front, draw cord at the bottom, shoulder pockets, and a no-hood simple collar.

*** Soft Shell Cold Weather Jacket and Trousers** replace the ACU in extended cold weather environments. They are made of a highly water-resistant, windproof material that increases moisture vapor permeability over current hard-shell garments. The garments provide a reduction in weight, bulk, and noise signature during movement.

*** Extreme Cold/Wet Weather Jacket and Trousers** include a waterproof layer for use in prolonged and/or hard rain and wet conditions.

*** Extreme Cold Weather Parka/Trousers** are used in extreme cold weather. They are highly water-resistant and windproof to provide wind and moderate moisture protection. They provide superior warmth and high compactability, low weight and low volume, and are sized to fit over the body armor during movement or static activities requiring maximum insulation.

Unit feedback should be directed to the Combat Development Directorate at the U.S. Army Infantry School at Fort Benning, GA, according to Pollack, while individual comments can be submitted at PEO's Web site at www.peosoldier.army.mil.

(Debi Dawson is the Strategic Communication Officer for PEO Soldier.)